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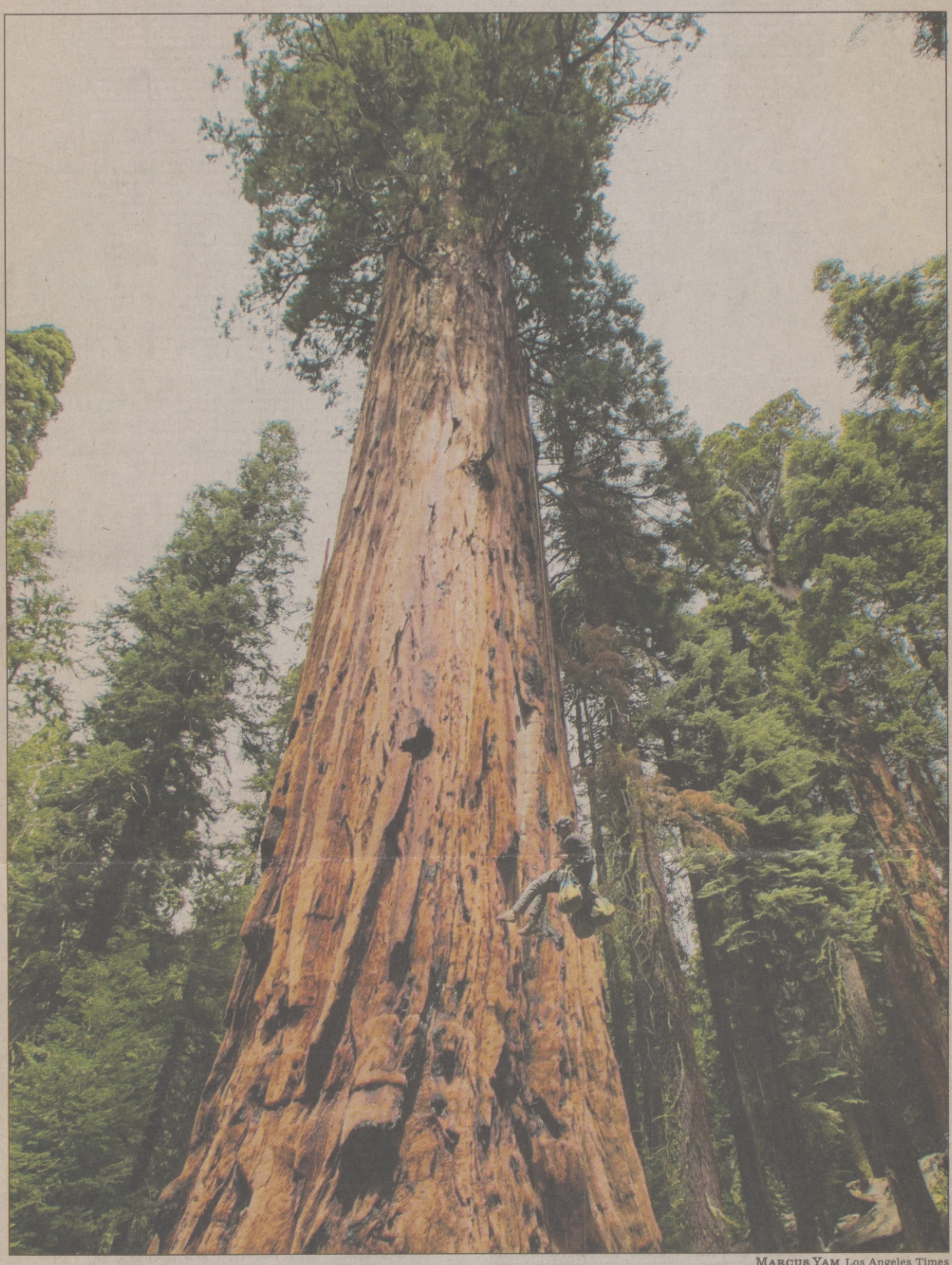

MARCUS YAM Los Angeles Times

ANTHONY AMBROSE rappels down a sequoia after rigging it for climbing to conduct drought research in Sequoia National Park. Scientists are trying to unravel the mysteries of the trees' internal plumbing.

Giants' checkup reveals good news and bad news

Sequoias are holding up amid drought but showing stress

By Thomas Curwen REPORTING FROM SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK

Sixty feet from the top of a giant sequoia named Kong, biologist Anthony Ambrose studied the foliage around him. Dense clusters of green leaves grew like shaving brushes from the branches, cones clustered like Indian clubs.

Topping out 25 stories above the ground, Kong was spectacular, an ancient beastly creature well-suited for its name. Its trunk at the base measured 17 feet across.

This broccoli top, Ambrose thought, was doing well, much like the other sequoias he had climbed.

Ambrose is one of four biologists whose work in the trees this summer has led various media to report that the state's drought could be killing one of California's most famous treasures.

But researchers say those conclusions are wrong, or at least premature. Despite signs of stress — leaves turning brown after four hot and dry years — most of the sequoias seem to be holding up.

The browning foliage, first noticed last summer, brought Ambrose and fellow UC Berkeley biologist Wendy Baxter to the Giant Forest last month to try to find out what's going on with the sequoias and, in the process, unravel the mystery of their internal plumbing: how these enormous trees use the water that's available to them.

For 15 days, Ambrose, Baxter and another pair of climbers measured 50 trees and installed humidity and temperature sensors in the upper limbs. On Saturday, they returned for more studies. [See **Sequoias,** A14]

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